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BACKGROUNDER 1-0435  
ROD TURNBULL/KANSAS CITY

MARCH 25, 1976

SOUTHWEST DROUGHT HANGING ON

ANNCR:

THE SOUTHWESTERN GREAT PLAINS OF THE UNITED STATES -- A PART OF THE SO-CALLED GRAIN BELT -- WHICH HAS BEEN SUFFERING FROM DROUGHT SINCE LAST FALL, HAS HAD ONLY MINOR RELIEF IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS. VOA AGRICULTURE SPECIALIST ROD TURNBULL HAS THIS REPORT ON THE SITUATION FROM KANSAS CITY.

VOICE:

IT'S NOW OBVIOUS THAT THOUSANDS OF HECTARES OF WHEAT IN THE GREAT PLAINS ARE NOT GOING TO PRODUCE GOOD CROPS UNLESS MOISTURE COMES WITHIN THE NEXT TWO OR THREE WEEKS. AND, SINCE THOUSANDS OF FIELDS HAVE ALREADY BEEN DESTROYED BY THE DROUGHT, THE FARMERS OF THIS LAND MUST NOW DECIDED WHAT THEY SHOULD PLANT TO REPLACE THE RUINED WHEAT PLANTS. NEARLY ALL EXPECT TO GROW SOME CROP ON THE DAMAGED LAND, EVEN THOUGH THE WHEAT CROP HAS BEEN LOST. AND, ABOVE ALL, THEY DON'T WANT TO LEAVE THE LAND BARREN DURING THE SUMMER, WHICH WOULD LEAVE IT SUBJECT TO WIND EROSION. AT THE SAME TIME, AGRICULTURE AUTHORITIES ARE ADVISING THE FARMERS TO GET SOMETHING INTO THE GROUND AS SOON AS THEY POSSIBLY CAN.

BUT THE PROBLEM OF GETTING ANOTHER CROP STARTED IS THE SAME AS THAT WHICH HAS CAUSED THE TROUBLE THUS FAR... THAT IS, THE LACK OF MOISTURE. NO SPRING PLANTING WOULD TURN OUT SUCCESSFULLY UNLESS RAIN FALLS TO GIVE THE NEW SEEDLINGS A START. FORTUNATELY, EXCEPT IN THE MOST UNUSUAL YEAR, MAY AND JUNE ARE MONTHS OF GOOD RAINFALL IN THE UNITED STATES

UNABLE TO PULL ITSELF TOGETHER -- EVEN TO DISCUSS THE GROWING DEMANDS FOR MISSUS PERON'S REMOVAL. BY MID-MARCH, INFLATION WAS HEADING FOR AN ANNUAL RATE OF OVER SIX HUNDRED PERCENT. LEFTIST GUERRILLAS WERE ATTACKING MILITARY AND POLITICAL TARGETS SEEMINGLY AT WILL. AND THE FORTY-FIVE-YEAR-OLD WIDOW PRESIDENT INSISTED THAT SHE STILL HAD THE SUPPORT OF THE WORKERS.

ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL JORGE VIDELA TOLD MISSUS PERON'S DEFENSE MINISTER THAT THE MILITARY WAS PREPARED TO MOVE IN IF TOTAL CHAOS ERUPTED. AND HE SAID THE MILITARY HAD ALREADY BEGUN THE COUNTDOWN TO WHAT HE CALLED AN EXTREME MEASURE OF FORCE.

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